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United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme
First session
Nairobi, 23–27 June 2014

Draft proceedings of the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

Introduction

1. The first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme was held at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi from 23 to 27 June 2014.

I. Opening of the session

2. The session was opened at 10.20 a.m. on Monday, 23 June 2014, by Mr. Hasan Abdel Gadr Hilal, President of the Assembly.

3. The President announced that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 67/213, at the current session the Assembly would use its applicable rules of procedure and the applicable rules and practices of the General Assembly pending the adoption of new rules of procedure.

4. In line with rule 62 of the rules of procedure of the United Nations General Assembly, he invited the Assembly to observe one minute of silence for reflection.

5. In his opening remarks, he welcomed all those present to the first session of the Environment Assembly, which he said represented a historic event in the evolution of UNEP. As the outgoing President, he thanked all stakeholders for their support and dedication to achieving tangible results in the field of sustainable development. It was only through collaborative efforts that UNEP would continue to forge "the way forward". He expressed pride in the achievements of UNEP, thanked its core of professionals and acknowledged particularly the work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The Environment Assembly was the leading global authority on and advocate for environmental issues. Arid and semi-arid regions were particularly threatened by the destruction of ecosystems, biodiversity and human habitats; such fragility, coupled with other drivers of change, such as population growth, meant environmental issues required more urgent attention. Unified efforts to address those challenges had been carried out by organizations including the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The issues on the agenda for the current session, which included the post-2015 development goals, needed to be placed on an equal footing with objectives of peace and security. The Environment Assembly was well-placed to provide political guidance and serve as a scientific interface to foster sustainable development. Its wide reach into legislative and administrative arenas rendered it a ground-breaking platform, but the onus was on it to elaborate key actions in the performance of the tasks that lay ahead and to create a greener future that would create the conditions for poverty eradication and social and economic equality. In closing, he

urged the Assembly and its partners to work in a spirit of togetherness and to take bold decisions to shape responses to current challenges.

6. Opening remarks were then delivered by Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi; Mr. Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director; and Ms. Judy Wakhungu, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Water and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kenya.

7. In her statement, the Director-General said that the current session of the Environment Assembly marked a milestone in the implementation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) commitments and was a crucial step in the upgrading of UNEP. She recalled the historical founding of UNEP in Kenya in 1972, when it had been considered that United Nations bodies should be located with regard for equitable geographic distribution in the name of social advancement of all peoples. The trust placed in Kenya had been well-founded, as demonstrated through the progress made across the continent in respect of sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, the United Nations presence in Kenya had continued to grow to encompass bodies such as UNAIDS and the World Health Organization global security section. The United Nations Office at Nairobi had been created in 1996 to provide a secretariat to assist and serve United Nations entities on the African continent and worldwide. It was currently the third largest United Nations Office and a hub for all United Nations operations, and it would continue to support UNEP in advancing its agenda and serve as a voice for the promotion of sustainable development and environmental rule of law. The presence of participants at the current session affirmed the importance that the international community placed on global environmental management. Lastly, she expressed thanks to the Government of Kenya for its support and its efforts to achieve a peaceful world for all.

8. The Executive Director began by expressing his thanks to the leaders of Kenya, who had endowed the Environment Assembly with meaning and made UNEP and Nairobi the environmental capital of the world. The Assembly had received all the support it had requested and all involved had reason to feel proud. Many stakeholders had made the journey to witness history being made with the birth of the Assembly. Sometimes, he added, the importance of an event could only be grasped after it had taken place: participants at the Stockholm Conference in 1972, for example, might not have understood that their efforts would drive four decades of environmental governance and a more diverse membership of the United Nations. In that regard, he commended particularly the engagement of developing countries in UNEP. Drawing on the current World Cup, he emphasized that stakeholders in the Environment Assembly would learn not only to play but also to work together. He thanked the outgoing President of the Environment Assembly, who had offered guidance and trust and who could step down with pride, the UNEP staff members and members of the Bureau who had spent months preparing for the current session and continued to work behind the scenes, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which had committed itself to bringing together the international community to achieve their aspirations. UNEP was committed to its presence in Africa and to continuing to represent a United Nations family at its headquarters. He concluded by thanking those who had made the journey, despite security concerns, to attend the historical event, and Kenyans, declaring that "together we move forward".

9. Ms. Wakhungu expressed her pleasure at being part of the first session of the Environment Assembly on behalf of the Government of Kenya. Welcoming the upgrading of the Governing Council to the Environment Assembly, she said that the current session Assembly followed up on the milestones of the Rio+20. The Government of Kenya was committed to providing support for the work of UNEP. Kenya, she said, aimed to transform Kenya into a middle-income country through its economic initiative, Kenya Vision 2030; to that end, policies and programmes on lower carbon emissions and the creation of a climate-resilient pathway were being drawn up and heavy investments had been made in wind and solar power. Environmental problems underscored the relevance of UNEP, which was therefore expected to provide leadership for environmental policies. She urged the adoption of the Rio+20 commitments, and to enhance the advocacy role of UNEP she called for an increased budget for UNEP. Growing challenges required urgent measures, and she called for all to consider all issues carefully and to cooperate closely, saying that only a global community could rise to the increasing environmental challenges facing the world.

II. Organization of work

A. Election of officers

10. At its first plenary meeting of the session, on 23 June, the Environment Assembly adopted a draft resolution prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (UNEP/EA/1/L.1, resolution 4, Implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development) providing that each of the five United Nations regions would be represented by two members in the 10-member Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

11. The Assembly then elected the following officers by acclamation:

President: Ms. Oyun Sanjaasuren (Mongolia)

Vice-Presidents:

Ms. Judy Wakhungu (Kenya)
Mr. Mahmoud Samy (Egypt)
Mr. Sargon Lazar Slewa (Iraq)
Mr. Attila Korodi (Romania)
Ms. Khatuna Gogaladze (Georgia)
Ms. Idunn Eidheim (Norway)
Mr. Chris Vanden Bilcke (Belgium)
Mr. Mariano Castro (Peru)

Rapporteur: Mr. James Fletcher (Saint Lucia)

12. In her acceptance remarks, Ms. Sanjaasuren said that she was honored to have been entrusted with the task of chairing the first session of the Environment Assembly, which she said was a historic event that would not only define the future of UNEP but also support an institutional framework and programmatic platform for sustainable development that could enable the transformative changes required to address complex environmental challenges through collaboration and the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

13. Outlining a number of items on the agenda for the session, she highlighted the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals, including sustainable consumption and production and illegal trade in wildlife as key priorities. On the former item, she said that it was important to recognize that every country started with a different baseline of challenges, needs, priorities and response capabilities in the context of universal sustainable development goals and to find the means to fully implement the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns, as sustainable consumption and production were a prerequisite of sustainable development. It was also essential to find the means to help countries to achieve a green and socially inclusive economy. Regarding illegal trade in wildlife, she said that tackling it would require, among other things, increased international cooperation and awareness raising. In closing, she urged representatives to engage positively throughout the session in order to reach their common objectives and meet the high expectations of the international community for the first session of the Assembly.

B. Adoption of the agenda

14. The Environment Assembly adopted the following agenda for the session, on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/EA.1/1 and UNEP/EA.1/1/Add.1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Organization of work:
   (a) Election of officers;
   (b) Adoption of the agenda;
   (c) Organization of work.
3. Credentials of representatives.
4. Amendments to the rules of procedure.
5. Policy issues:
   (a) State of the environment;
   (b) Emerging policy issues;
   (c) International environmental governance;

(d) Coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system on environmental matters;

(e) Coordination and cooperation with major groups;

(f) Environment and development.

6. Follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of United Nations summits, in particular the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and major intergovernmental meetings of relevance to the United Nations Environment Assembly.

7. Budget and programme of work for the biennium 2016–2017 and the Environment Fund and other budgetary matters.

8. High-level segment.

9. Provisional agenda, date and venue of future sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

10. Other matters.

12. Adoption of the report.

13. Closure of the session.

C. Organization of work

15. At its first plenary meeting, on Monday, 23 June 2014, the Environment Assembly agreed to meet in plenary to decide on organizational matters, to adopt resolutions and to hold a high-level segment focusing on two themes that had global resonance: first, "the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, including sustainable consumption and production"; and second, "illegal trade in wildlife". It also agreed to take up agenda items 3, 10, 11 and 12 at its afternoon plenary meeting on the final day of the session.

16. Also at its first plenary meeting, the Assembly agreed, pursuant to rule 60 of the rules of procedure, to establish a committee of the whole and a working party, which would be open-ended and would meet concurrently. The Committee of the Whole would consider agenda items 5, 6, 7 and 9, and would be chaired by Mr. Fernando Lugris (Uruguay). The working party would be chaired by Ms. Julia Pataki (Romania) and would discuss amendments to the rules of procedure and the stakeholder engagement policy. In view of the heavy workload and time constraints for the session, the working party would begin its work as soon as the Committee had completed its general discussion of relevant subjects and would submit a report on its deliberations for consideration and adoption by the Environment Assembly in plenary by the final day of the session. It was further decided that an open-ended friends of the President group would be formed to assist the President in preparing the outcome of the session. In accordance with rule 18, the chairs of the Committee of the Whole, the working group and the friends of the President group would be invited to brief the Bureau on a regular basis.

17. The Assembly further agreed at its first plenary meeting, under rule 37, to establish a maximum time limit of five minutes for all statements by representatives of Member States and three minutes for those of intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations.

D. Policy statement by the Executive Director

18. In his policy statement, the Executive Director traced the origins of international cooperation to the founding of the United Nations, which he said embodied the determination of humanity to create a peaceful future through collaboration and a common vision. Societies had on many occasions failed to live up to the aspirations of the United Nations, but those aspirations nevertheless remained valid. Sustainability and the environment, which had not been in the minds of the drafters of the United Nations Charter, were now at the forefront of the international agenda, thanks to landmark conferences that had begun to ask hard questions about how human beings could live together on Earth. The last such conference, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), had articulated a vision of the Environment Assembly as a platform for addressing such questions, which had become ever-more relevant as human beings had become a defining factor in the future of the planet.

19. The environmental agenda of the twenty-first century focused not just on protecting the environment, but also on the huge social inequalities and unsustainable development patterns that were

at the root of the environmental crisis and, as evidenced by the far-reaching decisions adopted at Rio+20 and later, addressing the environmental dimension of sustainable development was not just a preoccupation of the rich, but a vital necessity for all.

20. Recognizing that the environmental dimension of sustainable development was not the sole purview of the environmental community, the Environment Assembly was a forum where all those who had an interest in an issue and a role in addressing it should participate. Thanking the wide range of participants attending the first session of the Assembly, he said that the session took place at a critical moment for the United Nations, as the negotiations of the post-2015 development agenda would test its capacity to transform itself and become more relevant to both citizens and Member States. Participants at the first session had a unique opportunity to define the contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to the post-2015 agenda and show that it was about using the best science and policy not only to protect the environment but also to provide food, energy, health and livelihoods to billions of people. They would also be able to address illegal trade in wildlife, which threatened both species and the livelihoods, economies and security of many countries and communities; to engage with the judiciary and other legal practitioners; and to discuss how to mobilize the substantial resources needed to finance the green economy.

21. With regard to UNEP, its substantive work had continued even in the midst of governance reforms undertaken in response to the outcomes of Rio+20. Much of that work was summarized in the UNEP Annual report 2013 and the Programme performance report for 2012–2013, as well as in the Evaluation synthesis report 2012–2013, which provided an honest assessment of UNEP performance and revealed both progress and shortcomings that UNEP was working to remedy. UNEP had invested considerable resources in delivering more detailed and results-oriented planning, performance and reports in response to the request by the Member States that United Nations organizations become more results-oriented, and it was incumbent upon the Environment Assembly, as the governing body of UNEP, to embrace this approach. UNEP was also working to improve its efficiency and had achieved extraordinary productivity gains in the secretariat, as well as gender parity in all posts except at the D-1 and P-5 levels. These steps demonstrated that UNEP was in no way complacent about its superior resources, mandate and status.

E. General statements by regional groups

22. Following the Executive Director's policy statement, representatives of regional groups of member States made general statements on the items on the agenda for the current session.

23. The representative of Thailand, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the discussions on the environmental dimension of sustainable development by the Environment Assembly would enable ministers to adopt more informed positions on principles such as that of common but differentiated responsibilities in the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, and that the outcomes would set a course for UNEP in the crucial work of promoting sustainable consumption and production and advancing an integrated approach to financing the sound management of chemicals and waste. In regard to the latter, the special programme that the Assembly would establish to support implementation of the Basel Convention on the Control of the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, was of particular importance. Expressing support for the proposed programme of work and budget for the biennium 2016–2017, he called on all member States to provide the voluntary contributions needed to assist UNEP in achieving its goals, suggesting the use of an indicative table to guide Governments on their share of the burden, and suggested that the programme of work and budget should take into account earmarked contributions to ensure that related activities remained in line with the organization's overall strategic objectives.

24. The representative of Egypt, speaking on behalf of African States, welcomed current efforts to strengthen regional and subregional offices and called for them to be adequately staffed and underpinned by a regional strategic delivery framework to ensure greater coherence and impact; the role of UNEP role in mobilizing human and financial resources was crucial and the United Nations Environment Assembly must ensure that such priorities were fully reflected in the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2016–2017. Regarding the first of the two themes of the high-level segment, he said that the post-2015 development agenda must be member-State-driven in order to ensure its collective ownership, and the sustainable development goals must be accompanied by stable, predictable and accessible financing mechanisms, together with sound monitoring and reporting systems, to ensure that every country met its commitments. As for the second theme, he stressed the

importance of developing a common global strategy to tackle the crime of illegal trade in wildlife by eliminating demand and strengthening laws and policies with deterrents, penalties and a zero tolerance approach. On the matter of the stakeholder engagement policy, he reaffirmed the need to respect the intergovernmental nature of UNEP as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly, and he called for an accreditation mechanism that allowed for the participation of nongovernmental organizations from developing countries in the work of the Environment Assembly, with the necessary financial support. Finally, he reiterated the importance that his region attached to the consolidation of UNEP headquarters functions in Nairobi. He concluded with a message of support on behalf of the African Union.

25. The representative of Colombia, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean region, said that it was important to continue efforts to strengthen UNEP regional and subregional offices for the effective implementation of the decisions adopted at key forums at the regional and national levels; those efforts called for adequate resource allocation in the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2016–2017. Turning to the other matters on the agenda for the current session, she said that it was necessary to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda was socially and economically inclusive, based on the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities; that countries had the means to implement international agreements on the environment and sustainable development, including new, stable and predictable financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfers; that institutional and technical capacities were strengthened for the sound management of chemicals and waste; and that developed countries agreed to lead efforts to develop models of sustainable consumption and production to which developing countries must, in turn, agree to adhere. A particular focus should be placed, among other things, on the vulnerabilities of small island developing States and their inclusion in the debates; on inputs for a draft global agreement on climate change to be presented at the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and on the right of access to information, participation and environmental rule of law, which were crucial to the promotion of sustainable development.

26. The countries of her region proposed that Mr. Fernando Lugris (Uruguay) be named Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

27. The representative of Greece, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, said that despite efforts made since the open-ended meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives much remained to be done to finalize the draft resolutions submitted for adoption by the United Nations Environment Assembly. Areas in need of particular attention included governance issues, such as the rules of procedure, the stakeholder engagement policy and the role of UNEP within the wider United Nations system, and environmental policy matters such as the science-policy interface, chemicals and waste, marine litter, ecosystem-based adaptation and air quality. Regarding the two themes of the high-level segment, he stressed the importance of UNEP highlighting the role of the environment in sustainable development and as an enabler of poverty eradication and inclusive growth and prosperity. UNEP, as the leading United Nations authority on the environment, must prepare for its lead role in implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

28. The representative of Japan said that it was important to deliver a powerful message from the high-level segment that all countries needed to take action to achieve the sustainable development goals. Welcoming the preparation of draft resolutions on, among other subjects, chemicals and waste and air pollution, he urged participants to work together to ensure appropriate global management and emissions reductions under the Minamata Convention on Mercury. He also expressed regret at the recent demise of Mr. Matthew Gubb, Director of the UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre and Coordinator of the early stages of the negotiations on the Minamata Convention.

29. The representative of Algeria, speaking on behalf of the joint coordination committee of the Non-Aligned Movement, drew attention to a range of declarations adopted at various events that covered many of the items on the agenda of the current session. The key test of the Assembly's ability to move away from a position of "business as usual" would, he said, be the approval of a budget that responded to the priorities of developing countries, especially in Africa, and the confirmation of assurances that UNEP headquarters would remain in Nairobi.

30. Following those group statements, one representative, saying that his country had long participated in international efforts to protect the environment and was increasing its contributions, financial and otherwise, to such efforts, said that degradation of the environment could only be averted through the combined efforts of every country and individual. The environmental dimension, he said, must be adequately reflected and prioritized in the sustainable development goals and UNEP must play a greater role in coordinating global efforts with member States, the secretariats of multilateral

environmental agreements and civil society, especially in the field of chemicals and waste management.

31. The representative of the major groups and stakeholders expressed satisfaction the fact that the agenda of the first session of the Environment Assembly addressed the global challenges related to environmental rule of law, the sustainable development goals and illegal trade in wildlife and timber, saying that it was important to ensure a rights-based approach to the Assembly's work and pay special attention to the needs of vulnerable indigenous peoples and communities. Experience, he said, had shown that UNEP could only deliver on its mandate by working in partnership with civil society, which called for the promotion of a robust and inclusive stakeholder engagement policy and the adoption of appropriate rules of procedure. He expressed profound concern at what he said was a risk of regression from good practices reflected, inter alia, in the United Nations General Assembly resolution establishing the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and over what he described as serious inadequacies in the UNEP access-to-information policy with regard to the grounds for refusal, the appeals panel's lack of independence and the lack of accountability in decision-making.

F. Report by the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

32. Mr. Sunu M. Soemarno (Indonesia), Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, reported on the Committee's preparations for the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. Particular attention had been paid to the structure and organization of the session; to amendments to the Assembly's rules of procedure; to the enhancement of stakeholder engagement in the work of UNEP; and to the 12 draft resolutions contained in document UNEP/EA.1/L.1. In regard to the latter, the Committee recommended that the resolutions be clustered and considered in a strategic manner, and it had accordingly decided to present them in an omnibus format. Furthermore, it had engaged in an informal process to discuss the scope, format and content of a potential outcome document. A "zero draft" of such a document had been circulated to all delegations, regional groups and economic and political integration organizations. A summary of the informal process on the zero draft had been transmitted to the Bureau.

III. Credentials of representatives

33. [*To be completed*]

IV. Amendments to the rules of procedure

34. [*To be completed*]

V. Policy issues

35. [*To be completed*]

A. State of the environment

36. [*To be completed*]

B. Emerging policy issues

37. [*To be completed*]

C. International environmental governance

38. [*To be completed*]

D. Coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system on environmental matters

39. [*To be completed*]

E. Coordination and cooperation with major groups

40. [*To be completed*]

F. Environment and development

41. [*To be completed*]

VI. Follow-up to and implementation of the outcomes of United Nations summits, in particular the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and major intergovernmental meetings of relevance to the United Nations Environment Assembly

42. [*To be completed*]

VII. Budget and programme of work for the biennium 2016–2017 and the Environment Fund and other budgetary matters

43. [*To be completed*]

VIII. High-level segment

44. [*To be completed*]

IX. Provisional agenda, date and venue of future sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly

45. [*To be completed*]

X. Other matters

46. [*To be completed*]

XI. Adoption of the report

47. [*To be completed*]

XII. Closure of the session

48. [*To be completed*]